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Aunt Esme loved her first night at the symphony

By ADRIAN WALLER
of The Gazette

Last night was the night when Aunt Esme donned her new mauve hat and went to the Symphony — for the first time in her long, tired life.

The concert was a community affair of the Montreal Symphony and the tickets had been handed out free by any one of 24 social welfare agencies like The Friendly Home for Young Women, The Negro Community Centre, the Salvation Army and the Old Brewery Mission.

Aunt Esme sat at the back of Place des Arts and watched one of the most varied symphonic programs possible.

CHANGED

It was changed. Originally, Tchaikovsky's Fourth Symphony was to have come first. But it was later decided to leave it until last and this posed an interesting question: Whom, among a non-theatre-going audience would wait to hear it. "Symphony" can be a dirty word. Besides, there was a galaxy of chesnuts coming first.

The heartening thing is that nearly everyone did stay. And Aunt Esme gave the reason. "Listen," she whispered, "I honestly didn't realise a concert like this would be so nice. I thought it would be dull, you know, with lots of heavy sounds. "Of course, I'll wait for the Tchaikovsky one. I always liked him ever since I heard his Swan Lake."

That wasn't on the program last night. What was, was very gratefully received. At 8.40 p.m. Franz-Paul Decker, the regular conductor, stepped out to less applause than that afforded by more ardent concert-goers.

Down came his baton. There were two chords — a short one followed by one much longer. And Rossini's Overture to the Barber of Seville had begun. Sweeter strings, Aunt Esme ventured, she had never heard. And a more elegant man than the lean, immaculate Decker she had never encountered in her whole life.

6000 FORM

Actually, although Aunt Esme may never have known it, Decker was in his best form. He seems to bring soul from his orchestra without moving his baton — even at moments of climax. While perhaps it would have been more exciting to have seen a more youthful conductor trashing life-blood into his music with a violent baton, it was equally exhiliarating to watch a traditionalist.

"To me, he's grossly underrated." I whispered to Aunt Esme. "Just watch him lift that orchestra up into a terrific sonic spectrum, then take it down to nothing."

He has done it many times before. Last night he made his strings bounce contentedly through the humor of Rossini then sing out the hauntingly-romantic line of Schubert's Rosamunde. In between the singing and the bouncing, there is a man painting pictures with sound. "It's like using deep, dark browns, greens and blacks on an artist's canvas," I told Aunt Esme, "and blending them into a harmonious entity with delicate pastels — pinks, yellows and pale blues."

Of course, an orchestra can perform virtually anything without a conductor, but the outcome would invariably lack subtle variations in tempo and volume. The phrases wouldn't have beginnings and endings and might never blossom in between. In short, the music would lack a dimension and profoundness.

"Whatever is said of Mr. Decker," I said to Aunt Esme against the applause, "he most certainly can't be accused of not being profound. Besides, he has an unerring ear for tempi and for what is not good musical taste."

EMPATHY

Decker also has an empathy in performance — a regard for a soloist whether it be a singer, flautist, pianist or anyone else pitting themselves against the mighty orchestra. Last night it was a young romantic violinist of the Montreal Symphony, Janos Mate, 23, a Hungarian, who played Pablo Sarasate's Zigeunerweisen a good deal better than you might have heard it in the local Hungarian restaurant ... and provoked cries of bravo!

Then came Three Hungarian Dances of Brahms, crisp and lavish, and excerpts from My Fair Lady, which found Decker with a sense of fun. Such pieces as Get Me To The Church On Time and Wouldn't It Be Luverly? have satirical implications in the hands of a symphony orchestra.

Aunt Esme agreed. But her favorite was the Tchaikovsky ... and the Schubert ... and the young Hungarian violinist.

"Goodnight," she said.

"And thanks for your help. I've got a feeling I'll be coming back."

Pop falls into nitty gritty at Paul Sauve arena

By HERBERT ARONOFF
Written for The Gazette

If you were wondering about the state of the art, pop music has fallen on its nitty gritty. A visit to the Tyrannosauros Rex — Edgar Winter — Johnny Winter pop-hop at Paul Sauve Arena last night would have told you all.

First, you have to realize that the name Winter is one to be seriously reckoned with in this town. Both albino brothers have a firm grip on the freakier fringes of our already far-flung pop fans. The ones who love to stretch their ear drums taut over interminable high notes come in droves to stand and squirm in front of the big speakers. That and the flowing near-white hair that both Winters sport is an unbeatable combination.

But don't forget the music. Despite garage acoustics at Paul Sauve, the Winter boys gave all they had last night. Edgar's boogie band, White Trash, is still looking for a lead guitarist, Johnny's "And" band needs a drummer, but niether suffered.

LaCroix, White Trash's sax-singer, belted gospel together with Edgar and got the crowd up and dancing. The band greased boogie all over the hall and little boppers freaked and clapped and jumped up and down in their faded blues and fading faces.

Johnny came on in floppy felt hat and silver sequins, his partner-guitarist wearing thigh-high red leather boots. Despite the fashions, they are still fine practitioners of the art of concertizing. Concertizing is the art of slurring the music in the interests of performance. With the sound what is is at P.S., you couldn't blame them for the pyrotechnics. Besides, once again, the crowd loved it all.

And T-Rex, the gruesome twosome from Britain? Their equipment didn't arrive, I'm told, and they didn't appear. No one missed them.

What moral do we draw from last night's little get-together? Just this: at a given time in a given city, there are always a few thousand young people who will pay to hear distorted sounds and watch showbiz freaks. And have a great time, too.

Funny, though, I didn't see Juan Rodriguez there ....

International season

TNM to visit Russia

Theatre du Nouveau Monde announced its plans for an international season in Montreal yesterday — and a tour of Europe early this summer.

Scheduled at the Port-Royal Theatre for the 1971-72 season: the Italian play, Les Archanges by Dario Fo; the Marriage of Figaro, a French play by Beaumarchais; a Czechoslovakian drama by the young writer Vaclav Havel called The Notice of Service and Shakespeare's Julius Caesar.

The company's artistic director, Jean-Louis Roux said at a press conference yesterday: "Our artists will direct their best energies to make people laugh and cry and be happy and be sad."

TNM also plans to produce two plays by Quebec authors. These will be announced later.

The company goes to Russia from June 9 to 20. It will present Moliere's Le Tartuffe in the Maly Theatre, next to the famous Bolshoi, in Moscow and later in Leningrad.

Before this, however, TNM will tour France, Belgium, Luxembourg, Switzerland and Czechoslovakia with a play called La Guerre. Yes Sir! by the Canadian playwright, Roch Carrier.

Directors of the plays: Jean-Louis Barrault, Jean Gascon, Albert Millaire, Jean-Pierre Ronfard and Jean-Louis Roux.

Settings and costumes will be by Robert Prevost, Mark Negin, Pierre Delbe and Yves Saint-Laurent.

Said Jean-Pierre Roux yesterday: "It is a veritable festival of the world to which audiences will be invited."

Why Manilans stay up late

MANILA — (AP) — The National Bureau of Investigation and three other government agencies are trying to find out who's showing sexy movies over Manila television channels.

The radio control office has received several recent complaints that Bombas, the sex movies popular in Manila theatres, are being televised after the local stations sign off at midnight.

The culprits could be fined 2,000 pesos — about $300 — and imprisoned for two years for each violation of the control office's regulations.

The clandestine telecasts are of poor quality and have no sound, an official said.

Plummer withdraws

Christopher Plummer has withdrawn from the title role in Shakespeare's Coriolanus at the National Theatre in London. The Canadian-born actor had a disagreement with the directors.

SPECIAL NOTICE
Due to unforeseen circumstances at P.D.A. the JUILLIARD QUARTET and LEONID HAMBRO, pianist, will give their concert at the Maisonneuve Hall on Sunday afternoon, April 25th, 4.30. Pro Musica Society takes advantage of this change of locale to offer the general public the unique opportunity to hear this internationally renowned group at reduced prices: adults $2.50 — students $1. Tickets on sale at P.D.A. 842-2112 and Pro Musica 845-0532 — 1270 Sherbrooke West. The programme will include works by Haydn, Wolpe and Brahms.

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